Stress Wan Kill Me: A Sociological Exploration of Graffiti in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

This study explores the hidden narratives conveyed through 71 student graffiti inscriptions and drawings collected in the second semester of the 2023/24 academic year on the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, campus. Graffiti data was collected from purposively sampled halls of residence and lecture theatre complexes. A content analysis was employed to identify and examine the themes conveyed by the inscriptions and drawings. This was supported by the attributions and judgments made by student participants who were conveniently sampled and interviewed as to the context within which the inscriptions were made and their meaning. The study revealed that student graffitists wrote on themes of sexuality, religion, emotion, national issues, complaints, moniker and name and shame. It concludes that campus graffiti destroys property and costs money to paint and replace and recommends that given the perceived limited avenues for venting student grievances, the university should institutionalize graffiti for student complaints on designated boards and places to assist management address these effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: Graffiti, Students, Institutionalization, University of Cape Coast

1.0 Introduction

Graffiti is seen as an ancient art form found in ancient caves [1] and therefore has existed since the dawn of civilization [2]. The word graffiti is used to describe scratched inscriptions found at these archaeological sites and helped to shed light on ancient societies. Ancient graffiti, particularly in Greece and Rome were used as public markings which used political messages to praise authorities; as advertisements written by merchants and as magical spells written by oracles, prophets and shamans [2 p 48]. Graffiti are drawings written, scribbled, scratched, drawn, smudged, incised or sprayed on a wall or other surface in a public or private place to visually communicate [3, 4, 5, 6, 1]. Graffiti is categorized variously to include tags, throw-ups, stencils, paste-ups (posters), slogans and piece (masterpiece) although the distinctions between these categories are often blurred [3, 4, 7]. They are classified into categories such as latrilania, humorous, public, tags, folk epigraphy or historical [8, 9, 10]. The phenomena are also analyzed from various perspectives to include, language/linguistics/discourse, cultural, gender, psychological, historical and art [8, 11]. In contemporary times, graffiti are used to reflect urban life but local variations exist that developed in connection with local social and cultural contexts. Graffiti, including street art graffiti, may be identified as public or private. Public graffiti occur within public view and are created in public or

private space without any formal or informal permission from owners [1]. On the other hand, private graffiti refer to those found inside buildings and enclosed stalls where visibility is limited to a certain number of people at a given point in time [12]. Graffiti therefore has the capacity to claim and reclaim spaces and places. This is because it transforms space into place by its presence and transforms place into a common public place [2].

These inscriptions, regardless of the content conveyed, are deemed to be dirty, subversive and vandalistic by society. In the words of [13 p24], graffiti are 'dirty words on clean walls'. [14 p4] see graffiti as an 'unsolicited, frequently illegal, act of image making. For [5 p35], illegal graffiti are a kind of "discourse of a transgressive nature", while [15 p176] had earlier described it as "a form of aesthetic sabotage". Together with street art, they are synonymous with vandalism, marginal youth and delinquency ([14], undesirable annoyance and a mere illegal act of vandalism and mischief which contribute to a general sense of heightened fear of crime and results in destruction of property [9]. [16], however, refutes this position when he suggests that through graffiti art, people can publish their ideas, speak about problems and highlight the darker side of a self-denying society (p. 42). Thus graffiti are not vandalism because it manifests personal and collective ideologies, expressing a wide range of issues. [4] also suggest that graffiti may be a deviant behavior but certainly not criminal or harmful. The pervasiveness of graffiti, its ability to reclaim spaces for the public as well as its influence on shaping public opinion makes it a threat to the status quo and socio-political order. The problematic nature of some forms of graffiti as well as the public responses to them have contributed to repressive policies designed by some city authorities to prevent and remove graffiti [4]. The distinction between graffiti as an art form and graffiti as a crime allowed local and national authorities to mix preventive and punitive measure by offering designated spaces for authorized graffiti, sometimes referred to as commissioned work. In the Sofia region of Bulgaria, [3] indicates that permission is given for graffiti crews to re-design public spaces and places to reduce crime in subways, serve as moral lessons and for educational purposes. This is also the case in some cities in China [17], Lisbon (Portugal) [5] (and Melbourne (Australia) [7] where street art graffiti are also commissioned as wall murals, student art projects and as advertisements of products to be marketed or relaying public health concerns.

Thus, in contemporary times, graffiti are viewed from different perspectives, largely being interdisciplinary but finds its deepest roots of discourse in sociological literature [1]. Graffiti is also seen as a language phenomenon and studied from as linguistic perspective [18]. It is seen as a form of communication and offers insights into people who author them as well as the society in which they belong [11, 19]. For some researchers, graffiti are used by subcultures or other marginalized groups such as students to express their unique viewpoints in the public domain [8, 11, 20]. Although graffiti are an ancient form of communication, graffiti since the 1970s and 80s, has been regarded as a "youth movement" and a "youth activity" [21 p387-388] engaged in by mostly males to express their identity and masculinity [22, 23]. Some researchers, [18, 11] have posited that graffiti serves a number of functions in society. These include (a) allowing the entry within public discourse of messages regarded as marginal by other media (b) providing the individual the opportunity to express controversial contents publicly, and (c) offering marginal groups the possibility of expressing themselves publicly. For [2], some key social functions of graffiti through a review of some case studies includes an indicator of the emotional consensus of people, a signifier of a people's multilingual positioning and as a tool for swaying public opinion. He explains that graffiti help to map people's emotions as happy, angry, sad or map the flow of pain and hate received by people of colour. His review of case studies in Kenya and Italy revealed that graffitists switch

codes between native and national languages and serve to indicate their multilingual and multilinguistic positions. Finally, graffiti can also have an affective presence as it helps to sway public opinion and shape state policies. For [14], graffiti and street art become valuable research lenses through which to unpack some of the tensions and contradictions of urban life. They thus see a relationship between graffiti, social conditions and urban space.

In a higher education context, graffiti may contribute to the campus environment in ways that promote or inhibit community, inclusion, and student success, especially for students holding marginalized or minoritized identities. Existing researches have explored the nature of school (campus) graffiti in a variety of settings to understand how students express their attitudes and ideas. A few of these student graffiti studies have been identified and reviewed from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iran) and Africa (Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana) [8, 9, 26, 11, 24, 25]

[26] use a fun theory to call for the institutionalization of fun in social settings generally and in academic institutions of higher learning in particular. The authors examine the extent to which institutionalization of graffiti in the societal culture of higher education institutions will enhance public expression among the members through their reflection on daily, social and academic life in a Saudi public university. Thus the study was intended as a contribution to enhancing the discipline of Organisational Behaviour that sees a learning organisation as one that continuously transforms itself through its existing practices and innovations to improve and facilitate the continuing professional development of its members. Hence, the study sought to help higher educational institutions to learn from the knowledge produced and introduce innovations into their setting.

[8] explored the thematic meanings of graffiti written on walls and tables in public secondary schools in Jordan in the second semester of the 2020/21 academic year. Here, he explored how graffiti in different contexts serve to air peoples' attitudes, beliefs, concerns, interests and feelings about their surroundings. The researcher used thematic and discourse analysis to categorise data into religious, political and emotional themes, each with its sub-themes.

[9] analysed graffiti in classrooms, corridors and washrooms in two universities in Jordan. They related the graffiti data to the socio-cultural values of the Jordanean society in order to explore how universities help students to voice their attitudes and thoughts. This was done using a thematic content analysis technique. The researchers concluded that graffiti serve different communicative, language functions related to personal, social, national, religious, political and taboo matters. Thus graffiti should never be overlooked by university management if they need to know the sentimentalities and desires of students. The authors recommended that graffiti should be institutionalized in higher education institutions.

[11] premised her study on the belief that students are a powerless group within the classroom setting. She thus attempts to investigate how university students in Iran (University of Esfahan) voice their opinions and express themselves using graffiti on classroom walls. Farnia documented and classified 200 pieces of graffiti found into themes such as love and hatred, politics, religion, poem, class notes, signatures, presence, date, complaints/despair, self-expression and love.

Within the African context, [25] had earlier examined student graffiti at the University of Benin within an atmosphere of national political/governance figures denying students from participating and sharing their views and concerns on mainstream governance issues in addition to censorship by university authorities. These students, who are marginalized from contributing to discussions of socio-economic and political issues and also prohibited from or denied avenues of public expression, seek other outlets and use graffiti as a favoured option. Nwoye found student graffiti on lavatory walls and stairways of one faculty building

and noted the graffiti collected focused largely on socio-economic and political issues (both local and international). Other themes identified centre on romance, comments on professors, courses, grading system and university administration. The author noted the interactive nature of the data particularly with data on the socio-cultural and political developments at the time. Thus, his study highlighted attempts of the student body to articulate and discuss issues of concern and the discourse strategies adopted through graffiti.

[24] examined the sociolinguistic analysis of graffiti in the University of Ghana (Legon) and expressed that graffiti are mediums through which political protest and political comments may be made. The study shed light on the graffiti found on doors and walls and explained that graffiti exhibits all properties of interactions and aids in communication. Despite the good contributions of this research, it subjects graffiti to the medium of communication about the political field only and ignores the use of graffiti in some other social setting.

It has to be noted however, that graffiti studies on students in higher education settings in Africa generally and Ghana in particular are few. In Ghana, cultural dictates silence children from engaging in and contributing to conversations seen to cover taboo subjects such as sex, sexuality and romance. This is because parents do not discuss reproductive health issues with children and assume that children will have the knowledge when they grow up. Within most Ghanaian households therefore, children must be seen and not heard as parents exert power and control over them, promoting some social distance between them. Students worldwide, as young adults by extension, are perceived as being deprived of enjoying the privilege of public expression and use graffiti to contribute to public issues, express their emotions and generally vent their concerns. In this study, the soft elements of graffiti practices in the University of Cape Coast (Ghana) were unpacked in order to understand students' expressions and representations as they use the public spaces such as walls of washrooms, lecture halls and stairways as well as lecture room tables to communicate. This study therefore focuses on the unspoken narratives that student graffiti seek to convey and identify the factors that encourage the writing of graffiti on a university campus. It hopes to contribute to the data base of graffiti studies in Ghana and also inform the university authorities about students' concerns on management issues.

Two main theories have been used to support the study. First is the Behavioral Theory of crime that has Watson, Skinner and Sutherland as the main contributors. This theory indicates that criminal behavior is learned through interactions with one's environment. As such, crime is not innate but it is learned through experiences and conditioning. Interacting with the environment may be in the form of observing others, experiencing rewards for criminal acts and exposure to criminal norms. Behavioral theory of crime also emphasizes the importance of the social context of crime i.e the social environment of family dynamics, peer groups and community in shaping criminal behavior. Reference to the social environment within which crime occurs makes aspects of this theory similar to the Social Learning theory of crime proposed by Burgess, Akers and Bandura. Bandura's contribution outlines the key components to include observation, attention, retention and memory, motor reproduction and motivation. Thus individuals learn from observing. They obtain new knowledge and behavior by viewing a model and this indirectly affects learning and behavior. When individuals get involved in graffiti crew or gang activities, they are exposed to norms that promote criminal activity.

The second is the Conflict Theory of crime (graffiti) propounded initially by Karl Marx and supported by others. This theory suggests that criminal behavior is a result of power struggles between different social groups, where the laws and definitions of crime are created and enforced by the dominant group to

maintain their power and control over marginalized groups, leading to the disproportionate criminalization of those with less power. The act of graffiti is viewed as a form of rebellion or protest against established power structures in society. Here, maginalised groups use public spaces to express their discontent and challenge the dominant narrative as they mark their territory or convey political messages of social injustice, political repression, economic inequality or voice resistance against policies through visual means. In this light, graffiti are perceived as a symbolic act of defiance against societal norms and the rules enforced by those in power.

2.0 Methodology

This study was conducted at a public University in southern Ghana. University of Cape Coast (UCC) is a public university situated in the historic town of Cape Coast in Ghana's Central region. The University of Cape Coast was founded in October 1962 as a response to Ghana's urgent requirement for well-trained educators. Initially established as a university college, its primary goal was to educate teachers for various educational institutions. In 1971, it transitioned into full-fledged independent university with the authority to grant its own degrees. Over time, the university has expanded its facilities and programs to cater to the needs of different sectors beyond education. The University of Cape Coast now has a total student population of about 80,000. It is organized into six colleges namely; College of Distance Education, College of Education Studies, College of Agriculture & Natural Sciences, College of Humanities & Legal Studies, College of Health and Allied Sciences, and School of Graduate Studies and Research. It now trains professionals in fields such as healthcare, business, law, and agriculture [27].

Graffiti research is seen to be multidisciplinary and thus could be researched from several perspectives. This study uses a qualitative methodology to explore and understand the thoughts and socio-political experiences of university students through their expression of graffiti. A preliminary investigation using students in a sociology class revealed that graffiti could be found in the washrooms particularly of the male halls or the male floors of mixed halls, some walls and male washrooms in lecture complexes and writable table surfaces in lecture complexes. Hence, two university halls of residence (male and mixed) were purposively sampled out of a total of eleven whilst two lecture theatre complexes were also purposively selected out of five because they had writable table surfaces for the study.

Data was collected using mobile phone camera, interviews with the help of one male research assistant in one month during the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. A female assistant who was tasked with collecting data from female washrooms indicated that there were none in the rooms. This was not surprising as the university management tries to erase graffiti inscriptions during the holiday period. Pictures were taken of inscriptions and drawing found. Convenience sampling was used to collect the views of some twenty students through interviews on the writings, inscriptions and drawings found. These participants were expected to make judgments and hence attributions on why students write graffiti and to help interpret the various graffiti found in the study. This was done to help understand why students write and draw on walls and tables. Messages that were written or inscribed in the local language (mostly Akan) were transcribed into English. A content analysis was employed to identify and characterize the focus of graffiti from students and examine the themes conveyed by the graffiti. This was supported by the attributions and judgments made by the participants in the interviews as to the causes and intentions of the student graffitists.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Participants who volunteered to share their views on graffiti on campus were mostly undergraduate students across all the four year groups. They comprised both male and female students who were studying a myriad of programmes from B.A Social Sciences, through BSc. Agriculture and Natural sciences, Bachelor of Education, to Bachelor of Commerce. (Accounting/Management option). These participants were aged between the ages of 17 and 26 years and have been identified as Participant 1 through to 20 (P1-P20).

3.1 General Description of Graffiti Encountered

The graffiti uncovered by this research were mainly within the student residential halls and lecture theatre complexes. Apart from a few that were captured on the inside walls of lecture theatres, the majority were captured in the washrooms of halls and lecture theatres as well as on the tables in some lecture rooms. Thus in terms of whether the graffiti found could be categorized as private or public, one can suggest that the graffiti found in this case was classified largely under private and it is so because student graffitists feared being caught in the act although they desired their works to be seen. This finding corroborates the views of [12] who view private graffiti as those found inside buildings and enclosed stalls where visibility is limited to a certain number of people at a given point in time. Where tags were scribbled to indicate the presence of a particular person on a wall or table, mostly 'nick names' or first names were used to disguise the identity of the graffitist particularly to university management. The inscriptions were done using pens, pencils, white board markers and sharp metals such as the compass often found in mathematical sets.

Again, a few of the inscriptions were written or carved in pidgin English as in "stress wan kill me", abbreviated because of perhaps the vulgarity of it (eg F*ck my pussy) or in the vernacular language (mainly Akan). Students expression of graffiti both in the vernacular and English shows the multilinguality of the writers. This finding is also in line with the findings of [2] in his study of graffiti in Italy and Kenya where graffitists were found to write in both the local language as well as the national language. Participants' who were interviewed claimed that almost all the graffitists were male undergraduate and graduate students, some of whom are over-hyped and deviant, a few 'hard core' female students and probably some people who live in the satellite communities of the university. This perception of graffitists being mostly youthful males is also captured in the literature [22, 5, 23]. Here, older graffitists were seen to have been involved in their youth whilst the few females who dare to engage in the supposed male activity must dress and behave like males to be accepted by the graffiti fraternity.

3.2 Factors that Encourage Graffiti in University of Cape Coast

Participants claimed that students write and draw on walls and scribble on tables for a number of reasons. These include boredom, create fun, a desire to be remembered after school, and a desire to communicate something to the university community.

Most participants claimed that student graffitists do so out of boredom. Here, they are inclined just to write something to create fun among their readership. One participant claimed he had ever scribbled on a lecture room table and wall while learning because he was bored.

> Okay me personally I have written on walls and tables before in various lecture theatres while studying because I was bored, so I had to do something to entertain myself. I was scared though because I knew it was prohibited.
>
> (P3, 25-year old male Level 400 Biomedical Science student)
>
> I think they basically write on the walls for fun, what we call fun fooling.

(P6, 24-year old male Level 400 B.A Social Science student)

The above claims of participants are supported by the literature on graffiti. Studies also indicate that students engage in graffiti when they are bored in class, studying alone [9] or when challenging their rule-bound everyday lives [11]. [28] suggest that lecturers must encourage students to participate fully in class to reduce their boredom.

Another reason for the production of graffiti by students is the desire to be remembered after school by continuing students. For some other participants, it is a way for the graffitist to reminisce about school life when they leave or eventually return to campus after graduating.

> Some students write graffiti so the next batch of students would see their
> inscriptions and get a fair idea of who they were.
> (20-year old female Level 300 B.A Social Science student)
> Oh, it is for the hype and I believe they want to reminisce about school
> life when they come back after some time after graduating.
> (P20, 22-year old female Level 400 BSc. Agriculture student)

This finding supports [11] observation that students use graffiti to emphasize their individual sense of being within the collectivity, seek recognition and confirm their identity.

A third reason gleaned from the interviews is the fact that campus graffitists communicate something to the public or readership. They either share their views on topical issues, share their frustrations, feelings and emotions on their experiences on campus, communicate their affections for others, market some products such as laptops, pen drives, back packs as well as name and shame people who are perceived to have committed one crime or the other.

> When some of them want to vent their anger and frustrations, they write
> it on the walls and inscribe it on the tables. I have read lecturers are
> wicked and other profanities on lecture theatre walls
> (P15, 17-year old male Level 100 B.A Social Science student)
> Students write these inscriptions mainly to inform others what they are
> into or draw attention for people to get in touch with them. Sometimes
> they communicate the word of God, other times you see people
> advertising themselves as marketers or into prostitution.
> (P12, 26-year old male Level 400 B.A Arts student)

The voice of P2, a 24-year old male Level 400 B. Ed Management student, encapsulates all the above views when he says:

> I believe they are writing graffiti to put a message across. Those who
> are announcing their presence on the walls do not add their full names
> yet those who know them are able to identify them. Some also do it to
> make a name for themselves. I am aware of others who pass comments
> and viewpoints while others tend to do it just for the thrill of it.

It appears student graffitists are emboldened by what others write and draw to do same. This is attributed to the behavioural theory of crime which indicates that criminal behavior is learned through interactions with one's social environment. Thus, individuals observe, imitate and model after others. Hence, crime is not innate but it is learned through experiences and conditioning.

3.3 Scope of Issues Engraved/Scribbled or Drawn

Tables 1 to 7 give a general view of the scope of graffiti captured in the study during the first Semester of the 2023/24 academic year. A total of 71 graffiti inscriptions were captured in the study, 35 on walls and 36 on tables [see 29]. Those captured on walls in washrooms and lecture theatres have been painted over/erased by the university management (and this is done often to sanitize the university environment). Whiles the inscriptions have been categorized into themes such as emotion, religion, complaints, national issues, presence, profanity and name and shame, two others were seen not to fit into any of these categories. These are "Are you Adwowa? And "the people of the past were living in caves". In all the tables, (a) italicized graffiti was written in Akan language and authors transcribing placed in brackets (b) where graffiti contain names/contact numbers that can be linked to particular individuals, these have been omitted and substituted with just (Name) and xxxx and (c) (x2) indicates that the graffito was repeated a number of times in the data.

3.3.1 Theme of Emotion

Table 1: Sub-themes of Emotion

Sub-Theme/frequency	Table graffiti	Wall graffiti
Sexuality (15)	*I have a big dick for you Naa *Fuck me hard Kofi *_Kwasiasem trumu_ (nonsense asshole) *Sweet vagina *F*ck my pussy	*Call me for hook up *I am a lesbian *I like girls SVOC *I am into hook up so link up *I am a lesbian *Drawings of male genitals (x2) *Drawing of female genitals (x2) *Drawing of couple having sex
Romance (7)	*Perfect combi *I love you (x2) *Listening to music standing next to you *You got it	*The word love is complicated *Don't believe in women
Affection (1)	*Mama I love you	

Total 23

A total of 20 graffiti that suggest emotional theme were captured. Eleven of these were captured on tables while nine were on walls. These could be divided into subthemes as sexuality, romance and affection.

3.3.1.1 Sub-theme of Sexuality

Graffiti inscriptions that were prominent in all the inscriptions captured indicated that student graffitists were sexually aware and practiced, fantasized about sex or even practiced it as much as possible.

Five inscriptions were captured on lecture room tables and ten on walls in washrooms in the fieldwork with a sexual connotation. These included five graphic drawings of the female and male genitals and a couple engaged in a sex act. Participants explained that the theme on sexuality is not surprising as students

often visit the web and get all kinds of information from their peers, and social media influencers. Information with a sexual content is also found on televisions such as advertisements of sex enhancing aphrodisiacs, penis enlargement drugs as well as condoms. Since some social media celebrities and influencers advertise some of these drugs, they become role models for young adults (including students) to copy. Participants identified one particular inscription *Kwasiasem Trumu* (anal sex is nonsense) to abhor the practice of LGBQ activities. They explained that it is plausible that the writer has been influenced by the discussions made about the "anti-gay bill" placed before the parliament of Ghana.

3.3.1.2 Sub-theme of Romance

A total of six graffiti inscriptions were found on tables and walls in the study. These indicate the emotional and affective attributes of the writers in particular and young adults in general. They are shared below. They consist of two *"I love you"* inscriptions, *Perfect combi, listening to music standing next to you* and *you got it.* Others are *the word love is complicated* and *don't believe in women.* All the inscriptions except one show how romantic the graffitists are as they strive to explain what love is all about, declare love to loved ones or potential readership and create a picture of romantic scene with music. One graffitist however, appears to have ever experienced a disappointment in a relationship and thus cautions others to beware of women.

The last sub-theme identified here is one of affection. "I love you Mama" by the graffitist portrays his/her connection to the mother and shows that the writer misses his or her mother whilst in school.

3.3.2 Theme of Religion

A total of seven graffiti inscriptions on religion were captured on tables and four on walls in the study (See Table 2 below). These have been categorized into two sub-themes of evangelism, and unbeliever.

Table 2: Sub-themes of Religion

Sub-theme/ frequency	Table graffiti	Wall graffiti
Evangelism (9)	*God is coming now *Jesus loves You *Ohene Kese* (mighty God) *Deuteronomy 23:12-13 *When the time comes we will share our testimony	*Trust Jesus *Repent for the Lord is coming *Repent *(Name) won't go to heaven
Unbeliever (2)	*God is not God *It is a privilege to be fathered by Zews and that makes a man God/half hence *Kaakyire* Zews (lastborn of Zews)	

Total 11

3.3.2.1 Sub-theme of Evangelism

A number of these religious inscriptions acknowledge God and the love of Jesus and encourage the reader to repent. One particular graffito claims that a particular person will not go to heaven may be because that individual has not repented from his or her ways or leads a particular lifestyle that is not heaven worthy. One graffitist refers his readers to a biblical text in Deuteronomy 23:12-13. This text reminds readers that

God dwells in sanitary places and perhaps that "cleanliness is next to Godliness" as the adage goes so one must be clean and practice same if one hopes to dwell with God. It is a reminder to the Christian that one cannot dwell in sin and be with God and so there is a need to repent. These inscriptions show that perhaps the writers are Christians and are using graffiti to evangelize and inform their readership how mighty God is and how the future will be full of testimonies about his favours.

3.3.2.2 Sub-theme of Unbeliever

Participants believe that one particular inscription "God is not God" could have been written by an unbeliever or atheist who doubts the existence of God whilst another writer who compares herself or himself to God and Zews perhaps believes the he or she is superhuman.

3.3.3 Theme of Complaints

A total of nine graffiti inscriptions were captured. Almost all of these were on lecture room tables. These have been discussed under the sub-themes university management issues, student management issues and academic issues.

Table 3: Sub-themes of Complaints

Sub-theme/frequency	Table graffiti	Wall graffiti
University Management Issues (5)	*Fuck the system *Fix the lecture halls desks and chairs *UCC Halls are overhyped *UCC 5GB data is a scam	*Fuck UCC
Student Management Issues (1)	*SK-SRC president give us our bundle	
Academic Issues (3)	*stress wan kill me *Fuck the invigilator	*Lecturers are wicked

Total 9

3.3.3.1 Sub-theme of University Management Issues

The graffiti on the above sub-theme reflects frustration, or a desire for change in how the system works within the University of Cape Coast from the perspective of the writers. Thus, inscriptions such as "fuck the system", "fuck UCC" and "university halls are overhyped" were found in the study. One particular, graffiti calls on the university administration to fix the broken chairs and tables/desks in the lecture halls. Study participants agreed with the call and claimed that sometimes they find it very difficult to sit comfortably in the lecture halls, a situation that negatively affects the teaching-learning environment and achievement rates. The 'university halls are overhyped" graffito, it was claimed points to the deplorable state of conditions in the various halls of residence ie crowded rooms, insanitary conditions and poor infrastructure compared to the high hall fees that students are charged. These inscriptions demonstrate that students are politically aware of their rights as students as well as of the responsibilities of the institution's management. Thus, student graffitists are showing their frustration and dissatisfaction with some university policies and acts of commission or omission of management and student executives and desire a change. Since the students are perhaps afraid to publicly reach out to authorities over prevailing issues they choose to do so anonymously through graffiti. Students use of graffiti to make their voices heard and

speak against institutional management and authority may be explained with the conflict theory of crime. Here, student graffiti are viewed as a form of rebellion or protest against established institutional authority who is perceived as oppressing a minority and marginalized student group with regulations.

Since the students are perhaps afraid to publicly reach out to authorities over prevailing issues they choose to do so anonymously through graffiti. The call for the institutionalization of graffiti in higher education institutions by [26] may be in order here. Institutionalizing graffiti will allow students to anonymously contribute to issues and discussions that are made during student –staff consultative or hall meetings held during each semester. Students who may find public speaking difficult, cannot find the time to attend such meetings or fear that by raising certain issues they may be regarded by authorities as rabble rousers may resort to the use of graffiti to send their concerns across.

3.3.3.2 Sub-themes of Student Management and Academic Issues

These were also some sub-themes identified in the complaints general theme. The graffitist's request for the Student Representative Council (SRC) president to honour his pledge of improving the wifi situation on campus if elected as president during campaigning was seen in the graffiti study. Again three graffiti point to the stress of academic work. Whereas two inscriptions vent frustration with academic work ("stress wan kill me" and Lecturers are wicked") probably because of the intensity of the programmes and courses being read, the other attacks an examination invigilator for being too vigilant in his/her duties. Participants indicated that the university nationwide is noted for its stressful academic work and high standards demanded from students. Thus compared to other institutions of higher learning, the grading system is higher, a situation that compels students to put in a lot more effort before making good grades. Other participants believed that the stress students go through is a result of the university's desire to maintain its position as the first in Ghana and West Africa and among the best in Africa in recent years.

3.3.4 Theme of Profane

A total of eight graffiti on the above theme were captured in the study. These were grouped into the sub-themes of insults, threats and concern.

Table 4: Sub-themes of Profane

Sub-theme/ frequency	Table graffiti	Wall graffiti
Insults (6)	*(Name) tiri ho se asokwaa (referral to the bald head of a Ghanaian politician)	*Fuck ur father *Wo maame tw3 (your mother's vagina) (x2) *Ashawo contract (prostitute) *All women are scum
Threats (1)	*Touch my cedi or $ and I will kill you bitch	
Concern (1)		*Tokuro kitiwa, emu nsem pii (referral to small vagina hole with a lot of issues)

Total 8

Profane was mostly written in the vernacular and was directed at the reproductive organ of females and problems associated with it.

3.3.4.1 Sub-theme of Insults

Other graffiti deal with an insult to a father and calling someone a prostitute and all women scum. One graffiti in particular references the bald head of a high profile politician and likens it to that of a particular bird. This statement appears to be expressed in dissatisfaction with the way the country is being governed. Participants claimed this statement was quoted from a statement made by one national resident in the USA famed for his criticism and insults of national political figures. They suggested that this particular critic of political figures appears to be uncultured and vulgar and has completely lost respect for Ghanaian norms and values. As such he is a bad example for students who patronize his social media pages. Participants were also of the view that students have become politically aware with some taking active part in party politics and so they are not surprised at the graffiti seen.

3.3.4.2 Sub-theme of Threats

The only threat here cautions probably an ex-girlfriend not to touch the writer's money and perhaps alludes to the fact that this ex-partner had drained the writer financially while they were in a relationship. Participants also claimed that this particular graffito was in response to news in the social media that relate to ex-wives of footballers and other celebrities demanding hefty payout from their ex-husbands upon divorce.

3.3.4.3 Sub-theme of Concern

Under the sub-theme of concern, one particular graffitist seems to have a concern with a particular small hole that has a lot of issues in it. It is only plausible to suggest that this graffitist or someone close to him or her has personally encountered problems with the hole and hence his concern. Participants suggested that the writer is likely to be a male who has either impregnated a fellow student or has been forced to terminate a pregnancy. Apart from the insult to the politician, the rest of graffiti found under the theme of profane also indicate that the writers are very much sexually aware and active.

3.3.5 Theme of National Issues

Student's expressions of graffiti on societal and national issues accounted for seven out of the total data collected. These were divided into two main sub-themes of politics and social issues (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Sub-theme of National Issues

Sub-themes/ frequency	Table Graffiti	Wall graffiti
Political (5)	*Cheddar for president *Zakia for VALCO secretary *GH politician and UCC student politicians are the same *Gyimii Nkoa* (meaning stupid) *Student/GH politics are all the same *NPP and NDC are no good	
Social (2)		*Dutch passport is better than PHD in Ghana *UK passport is better than Ghana PhD and Degree

Total 7

3.3.5.1 Sub-theme of Political Issues

The period of data collection was one in which the country was gearing up for national presidential and parliamentary elections. It was also during the period when the student front was warming up for elections into SRC executive positions. It is no wonder that some of the graffiti inscriptions depict the atmosphere for the national and student elections. There are two graffiti campaigns, one for a candidate for national president and another for a student for a hall secretary. One inscription tends to condemn the two major political parties, (NPP and NDC), who have taken turns to rule the country since the fourth republican constitution was promulgated in 1992, as no good. Given perhaps the failure or disappointments of these two political parties, another student compares student political contests and activities to the national one, and concludes that both levels of politicians are jokers.

3.3.5.2 Sub-theme of Social Issues

The graffiti here contribute to a social media issue that hit social media platforms and the Ghanaian airwaves also during the period of data collection. It had to do with whether acquiring tertiary education in Ghana would help improve the livelihoods and wellbeing of the degree holder. While academicians and educationists defended the acquisition of skill and higher education, others felt these degree certificates were not important when compared to the benefits of acquiring citizenship in any developed country. It appears the graffitists in this case were making a contribution to the social media debate and were in support of a foreign citizenship and not higher education. Participants claimed that their colleagues preferred foreign citizenship because of first, the high graduate unemployment rates in the country and second, the fact that wages and salaries even for the degree holder are meagre and cannot support them. The inscriptions are therefore not merely expressions of individual opinions; they represent broader issues relevant in Ghana, and tend to resonate with ongoing discussions in social media. The socially themed inscriptions and context within which these were raised, reflect that citizens are not patriotic enough. They prefer other citizenships to the country of their birth and are ready to reject its education for bread and butter elsewhere. This is a wake-up call for higher institutions, governance structures and agencies and the private sector. Higher educational institutions must restructure their academic programmes in line with their mandates and cease to be one stop shops for all programmes. This will ensure that only a specified number of graduates are churned out each year to meet the demand in employment in that specific area. In Ghana, universities were specifically set up to train teachers, train administrators and managers, train students in science and technology, train students in issues of development, acquire skills for industry etc. Again governance institutions must intensify civic education and whip up patriotic sentiments among the country's nationals in general and the youth in particular. It is also a pointer to the Ministry of Education and its affiliates to ensure that the degrees that are churned out yearly can get its holders dignified jobs in the country. The government and private sectors are also to create the enabling environment for the expansion of job creation particularly for middle and higher level skills and administrators.

3.3.6 Theme of Moniker

A total of seven graffiti collected are in this category. (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Moniker Graffiti Collected

Table Graffiti	Wall Graffiti
*Pablo was here	*Fred was here
*Bozo was here some	*I was here some
	*Capoon

	*Signatures (x2)

Total 7

Seven graffiti inscriptions were recorded under the theme of Moniker (individuals who write graffiti). The study revealed that some student graffitists announce their presence in the institution by indicating that they were present. Here they use either their first names, nicknames or simply indicate "I was here some". Graffitists who indicate they were here some appear to be responding to earlier monikers who indicated that they were present in the institution. Within this theme is found others who simply tag their name (nickname) or scribble signatures just to announce their presence also in the institution. According to participants, some students want to be remembered after they have left school and so leave their names for the juniors to remember them.

3.3.7 Theme of Name and Shame

Table 7: Name and Shame

Table Graffiti	Wall Graffiti
*Adwowa is a thief	* (Name) is a wizard
	*(Name) is a witch
	*Dennis is a thief

Total 4

A total of four graffiti inscriptions that named and shamed people were found in the data collected. These were people either thought to be thieves either because were suspected to be thieves, caught stealing or caught in possession of stolen items. Participants in the study indicated that stealing of properties sometimes occurred within the halls of residence and it was only natural that some students who were found culpable be named and shamed. The tagging of some people as either a witch or wizard could not be substantiated by participants. The only plausible explanation given was that the writers believed in the existence of witches and wizards and so any student who exhibits traits that are in line with their beliefs will be labelled as such. Participants further elaborated on some of the traits as queer behavior and jealous tendencies towards someone who is academically good.

It is clear from the analysis of the study data that most of the themes student graffitists write on are similar and in line not only with other works in the school environment, but also general societal issues. The themes and subthemes of love, romance, sex, presence, politics, moniker and complaints about school and other societal issues support the findings of [26, 8, 9, 11, 24, 25] who all worked in the school environment. Some of the sub themes identified in the current study did not come up in the above works while the theme of name and shame was also not prominent in the above studies.

3.4 Conclusion

Student graffitists use graffiti to contribute to socio-political issues in the media, express their sexuality and love and affection, indicate their awareness of sexual reproductive activities, evangelize, insult and threaten, as well as show dissent among others. The rise of social media has significantly impacted student behavior and expression to the extent that young adults no longer cherish cultural values and norms. Platforms like X (Twitter) and Instagram promote trends and viral content, encouraging students to share their thoughts and identities in creative ways. This online culture often spills over into the physical environment, leading students to inscribe relevant hashtags, memes, or social commentary on lecture

tables as well as walls and washrooms in lecture theatres and halls of residence. Although graffiti inscriptions encourage self-expression by allowing students share their thoughts, ideas, and identities and promote engagement and thus contribute to a sense of community and belonging among students, graffiti can devalue and destroy university property and add to the cost through replacement of furniture or re-painting walls as is done frequently. It appears the structures and avenues to address student complaints and views are not adequate or functioning well and that is why students resort to graffiti to vent pent up feelings and frustrations. The call for the institutionalization of graffiti in higher educational institutions is in order to provide student specific places and boards to vent pent up feelings. This will save the university from unplanned expenditure and also give management an idea of the administrative, academic and social issues that confront students so that these could be promptly addressed.

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